Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2007
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe, log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #0933 08/17/07

~ U.N. Web Sites Hacked! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Skype Not Attacked!
~ Content Online Is King! ~ Spam Tricking Filters! ~ Wikia Gamers Guide!
~ MS: Prototype Broken! ~ Free Recycling By Sony ~ Madden Frenzy Anew!

~ Dangerous Sites Warning ~ Baby @ Name Rejected! ~ Harnessing Girl Power!

-* Web's Rife With Attack Codes *-
-* Web Use Could Kill Local Newspapers! *-
-* U.S. Seeks To Dismiss E-Mail Spying Case! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Another week has come and gone. Not much has changed since last week; the sun came up, the sun went down. The days are getting shorter these days - signifying that the summer is winding down. It's hard to believe, but Labor Day is rapidly approaching! Where did the summer go? I just don't know any more. I must be suffering from that common affliction called A.G.E.

Well, no earth-shattering controversial topics this week, so let's get right to the thick of things. Unfortunately, part of this week's usual entries is missing again. Due to the sparse activity in the newsgroups again this week, Joe's "People Are Talking" column is on a diet, and will not appear. We're all hoping that the message activity starts to pick up now that summer vacations are just about up.

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Madden Frenzy Begins Anew!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Hezbollah-Israel War Game!
Wikia Unveils Gamers' Guide
And more!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

'Madden' Video Game Frenzy Begins Anew

Say Madden this time of year and most everyone knows the reference is not about the Hall of Fame coach and sportscaster himself. It's about his

video game.

In an industry seemingly fixated on aliens, dragons and crime sagas, John Madden's football series rushes its way annually to the top of the sales charts, selling some 60 million copies in the past 17 years.

The newest version, "Madden NFL 08," debuts Tuesday for 10 different gaming systems with the sort of spectacle usually reserved for blockbuster movie premiers and "Harry Potter" books.

The hype for this year includes "Maddenoliday" festivities in New York's Times Square on Monday evening, where former players such as Eric Dickerson, Warren Moon and Marshall Faulk will meet with fans. Former New York Giants running back Tiki Barber will hand off the first copies of the game to rabid fans Monday night at midnight at Toys "R" Us.

For hardcore devotees like Steve Williams, a 35-year-old from the Houston suburb of Sugar Land, "Madden" is more than a game - it's a way of life.

"You're playing as opposed to just watching; it's like chess," said Williams, who goes by the handle "Coach" when he plays the game with others. "You are the coach, the general manager, you're everything that you've always wanted to be."

Williams is such a big fan he runs his own Web site, where he posts a podcast with insider Madden game tips. And recently he was among a handful of professional Maddenheads to participate in the taping of season three of ESPN's "Madden Nation" reality TV show, which airs in October.

The game has spawned a competitive tour, as well. Called Madden Challenge, the world's best ballers vie for cash prizes and a trip to Hawaii.

"Madden" has been a guaranteed profit maker for publisher Electronic Arts Inc. EA sold 7.4 million copies in North America last year, including 2 million in the first week, making it the top-selling title in 2006, according to market research firm NPD Group. Each copy retails for $30 to $60, depending on the game system.

The game's release comes at a crucial time for EA, one of the world's largest video-game makers, which recently saw first-quarter losses widen by 63 percent amid a seasonal slowdown.

There are other football games on the market but EA hasn't had much competition in terms of realism on the virtual gridiron because of deals it struck in 2005.

That's when EA reached an exclusive agreement with the National Football League and its players' association that prevents other publishers from making games that include actual NFL teams and players. A month later, EA got exclusive rights to use the ESPN brand in its video games.

Rival products include "All Pro Football 2K8." The game from 2K Sports, a division of Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., depicts historically important players like Jerry Rice and John Elway, but can't use current rosters like "Madden" does.

From its first release 18 years ago, "Madden" has transformed into something that closely mirrors America's obsession with real football, said Bryan Intihar, 30, news editor of the video-game magazine Electronic

Gaming Monthly.

"They call baseball America’s pastime but in the realm of video games it’s football," he said. "It’s become like a Mario. Madden is in many ways a video-game icon."

Intihar said he has already played the newest version and likes many added features, such as a bigger front-office mode, a superstar mode, and better performance, particularly on the Xbox 360 version.

Special icons now identify the strengths of franchise players like Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning and running back LaDainian Tomlinson of the San Diego Chargers. Another new feature, called "Family Play," is designed to make the game easier for Madden newbies on Nintendo Co.’s Wii console by simplifying the controls.

One thing Intihar said he and many others in the community are still waiting for, however, is online leagues that let players guide their favorite teams through an entire virtual season against rivals. For now, online games are limited to head-to-head matches.

Actual NFL players play as much as anyone, including Tennessee Titans quarterback and current "Madden" cover star Vince Young.

"We’re beautiful," he said of his team’s digital likeness in the game.

Young added that he’s "not even a little bit" worried about the so-called "Madden Curse." Earlier "Madden" cover athletes such as Marshall Faulk and Donovan McNabb ended up with injuries later in the season, leading some to conjure up a connection.

"You know you have to go out and play so nobody tries to worry about a Madden jinx," explained Titans receiver Brandon Jones, who often plays the game as other NFL players he’s friends with on other teams.

Hezbollah Brings Israel War To Computer Screen

Raid Israel to capture soldiers, battle tanks in the valleys of south Lebanon and launch Katyusha rockets at Israeli towns - a new Hezbollah computer game puts players on the frontline of war with the Jewish state.

"Special Force 2" is based on last year’s 34-day conflict between the Lebanese guerrilla group and Israel.

"This game presents the culture of the resistance to children: that occupation must be resisted and that land and the nation must be guarded," Hezbollah media official Sheikh Ali Daher said.

Designed by Hezbollah computer experts, players of "Special Force 2" take the role of a Hezbollah fighter, or Mujahid. Weapons and points are accumulated by killing Israeli soldiers.

The game, launched on Thursday, recreates key phases of the conflict, which was triggered when Hezbollah raided northern Israel and captured two soldiers, saying they wanted to negotiate a prisoner swap.

Hezbollah takes huge pride in its military performance in the war, which

killed 158 Israelis, mainly soldiers. Some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in Lebanon.

Israel says Hezbollah was weakened in the conflict, in which the group was forced out of its strongholds along the Israeli border and an expanded international peacekeeping force deployed in southern Lebanon under a U.N.-brokered ceasefire.

A Shi'ite Muslim group backed by Iran and Syria, Hezbollah declared the outcome of the conflict as a "divine victory."

"Through this game the child can build an idea of some of ... the most prominent battles and the idea that this enemy can be defeated," Daher said.

Retailing at around $10 in Lebanon and produced by volunteers, Hezbollah is expecting strong demand for the game at home and abroad. Hundreds of copies have been reserved in advance in Lebanon.

The 3-D game forces players to think and use their resources wisely, reflecting the way Hezbollah fights, Daher said.

"The features which are the secret of resistance's victory in the south, have moved to this game so that the child can understand that fighting the enemy does not only require the gun.

"It requires readiness, supplies, armament, attentiveness, tactics."

Wikia Unveils Gamers' Guide

Wikia Inc. is offering people who love online games a chance to use its guides to help them navigate landscapes, and beat foes in major games through tools developed by Playxpert LLC.

World of Warcraft players are already using a widget that gives them access to the 30,000 pages of advice on WowWiki, ensuring they beat monsters, win weapons and navigate more easily through the game.

People who play Second Life, Final Fantasy, Runescape and other games will see similar widgets soon said, Gil Penchina [cq], CEO of Wikia Inc., in a recent interview.

Up to now, any gamer could build a game collaboration site through Wikia and players from around the globe would fill them with advice and directions. But those huge databases weren't readily available to users in the middle of play. People would have to switch back and forth between their game and the site, holding them up and slowing down the game. The partnership with Playxpert means they will gain their own widgets similar to the WowWiki soon as well.

The widgets change that by not only allowing them to view pages from their wiki, but depending on the widget, users will also be able to give advice, chat, and control music selection, among other things.

The WowWiki widget opens as a pop-up, or overlay in front of the World of Warcraft game being played. It's transparent, so the user can see what's happening behind it, and it doesn't take up too much of the screen.

Videogame Industry Hopes To Harness Girl Power

Can "High School Musical" and "Hannah Montana" finally take girl gaming to the next level?

While most of the attention of teen and tween girls Friday night will be focused on the premiere of "High School Musical 2" on Disney Channel, Disney Interactive is hoping that interest eventually bears fruit in the gaming aisles of retailers nationwide.

Beginning with "High School Musical: Making the Cut" for the Nintendo DS, Disney Interactive is bringing out four titles based on the two licensing juggernauts in the coming months.

"The demand for both the ’High School Musical’ and ’Hannah Montana’ games has been enormous among retailers," Disney Interactive GM Graham Hopper said. "I think the industry is starting to wake up to the fact that girls play games."

Getting that female audience into video games, especially consoles, has long been a holy grail for publishers, and there have been encouraging signs. According to the Electronic Software Assn., 38% of game players are women or girls, and a Harris Interactive poll this year found that tween girls spend up to 10 hours a week playing games, compared with 16 hours a week for tween boys.

"The industry is still dominated by the male side, but we’re definitely seeing not just more female players but older gamers as well," said Beth Llewelyn, senior director of corporate communications at Nintendo of America. "We’ve had success with DS titles like ’Nintendogs’ but also with the ’Brain’ games - ’Brain Age’ and ’Big Brain Academy’ - that are definitely skewing more toward females."

The problem has been that girls and women tend to be among the most casual players, interested in easy-to-pick-up social games but not consistently shelling out $30-$50 for more complex fare.

"The real key is to get girls to begin obsessing over games the way they might obsess over a boy band or shows like ’High School Musical,"’ said Jessica Chiang, marketing producer at Her Interactive, which has carved out a niche making PC games based on the "Nancy Drew" license.

Chiang said the way to achieve that passion seems to be the right license, noting, "If they already like the TV show or dolls, they tend to want to get the game."

Added Hopper, "We already know that girls will play on the Nintendo DS and Game Boy Advance hand-helds," he said, touting the previous success of Disney Interactive titles for hand-helds based on "Lizzie McGuire" and "That’s So Raven." "But there have not been a lot of examples of huge successes on the home consoles, though we’ve got the two properties this season to see if that’s about to change."

It also is going to take the right platform, and Nintendo might have more of those answers right now.

"They’re justifiably quite proud of the way they’re growing the market, and they have lot of information to back up the fact that they’re really starting to get the female gaming audience," said Sarah Handley, senior global brand manager at THQ, which this year is bringing out a game based on "Bratz: The Movie."

Other companies, most notably the now-defunct Acclaim, had some solid sales in the past with games based on the Olsen twins. But they also might have done more harm than good because many of those properties lacked the thing that keeps girls coming back, which is good gameplay.

"This has to be more than just dropping a license on a box," Hopper said. "That’s one of the issues this industry needs to get away from." Hopper said the "High School Musical" game for the Nintendo Wii will be among the first to feature a microphone, while the upcoming "Hannah Montana: Music Jam" for the DS will allow up to four players to play various wireless instruments together.

"We didn’t need all the guitar features in ’Hannah,’ but we did it because want to create a great game," Hopper said. "I think the success of ’High School’ and Disney Channel has done a wonderful job in creating a mass-market phenomenon. But we look at it as a starting point, where we can move forward with game innovations and permanently expand the girl and tween gamer market."

=~=~=~=

A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Seeks to Dismiss E-Mail Spying Case

A U.S. appeals court agreed on Wednesday to weigh a government motion to dismiss a lawsuit alleging the National Security Agency (NSA) monitored phone lines and e-mails without a warrant, but judges asked a government lawyer tough questions over the issue.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) filed a class action lawsuit against AT&T Inc. claiming the company violated the privacy rights of its customers when it cooperated with an NSA program of monitoring AT&T customer phone calls and e-mail traffic without warrants.

Deputy Solicitor General Gregory Garre, representing the government, argued that letting the case go to trial, "would reveal the sources, methods and operational details" of government intelligence activities. The alleged monitoring is part of more rigorous surveillance practices put in motion after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

After a two-and-a-half hour hearing, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th District, in San Francisco, said it will consider the dismissal motion as well as a one in a second lawsuit also challenging the NSA program.

But Appeals Court judges Michael Daly Hawkins, Margaret McKeown and Harry Pregerson, peppered Garre with questions, challenging his argument that the state secrets privilege trumps the right of the plaintiffs to have their case heard.

Pregerson asked Garre how a court is to decide whether something the executive branch claims is a state secret is a secret, if the executive branch won't reveal what it claims is a secret.

"Who decides what's a state secret? Are we just a rubber stamp? We're just supposed to take the word of the executive?" Pregerson asked.

Garre responded that the court should give "the utmost deference" to the executive branch's claim that something is a state secret, but acknowledged that it is not an "absolute deference."

The EFF says that AT&T, at one of its offices in San Francisco, diverted Internet traffic, including e-mails and Voice Over IP (VOIP) phone calls, to a separate room in which NSA-authorized people monitored the network traffic. Robert Fram the attorney for EFF, said that just the act of diverting that traffic into a room controlled by the NSA proved their case against AT&T and that they would not have to try to risk violating the state secrets privilege by trying to disclose what was done with the information.

But Garre, in rebuttal, argued that if the surveillance done in that room was approved by a warrant, then there is no violation by the government or AT&T in diverting Internet traffic to that surveillance room.

The second case is that of the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation v. President George W. Bush, which claims the government engaged in warrantless surveillance of their organization, in violation of its constitutional rights.

The appeals judges gave no indication when they might rule on the motion to dismiss. Lee Tien, an EFF staff attorney, said given the notoriety of the case, the judges could render a decision soon, but at the same time, given the gravity of the issues, they might take more time.

U.N. Internet Sites Hit By Hackers

Hackers breached the United Nations Web site during the weekend, prompting the world body on Monday to stop posting new information while technicians evaluated the system, U.N. officials said.

Early on Sunday, the hackers defaced the official Web site on pages reserved for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with slogans accusing the United States and Israel of killing children.

The United Nations quickly removed the hackers' messages and on Monday stopped updating the site while the system was assessed, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

In addition to the main U.N. site, the web pages for the Economic and Social Council and the Paris Web site of the U.N. Environment Program were also attacked, Montas said.

She said U.N. investigations were underway and "quick action was taken to prevent damage to the computer system." Key financial information was not affected, she said.

A repeating message on the secretary-general's page read: "Hacked By kerem125 M0sted and Gsy That is CyberProtest Hey Ysrail and Usa, Dont kill children and other people Peace for ever No war" according to snapshots of the site by bloggers.

One of the three hackers claimed to be Turkish.

CNET, a computer and technology publisher. "The perpetrators appeared to have used a well-known and highly preventable technique called SQL injection, which takes advantage of flawed database programming to activate malicious lines of code," CNET said on its web site.

The defacements, which affected the secretary-general's site and news pages (HTTP://www.UN.org/news) were cleaned within hours, Montas said.

In an e-mail to CNET's news.com Web site, Giorgio Maone, an Italian software developer who has worked with the world body, said, "The U.N. staff just deployed a cosmetic patch, which hides it from the most obvious tests, but it cannot prevent an attack" and said he had offered his assistance.

At the Web site www.M0sted.org, there is a list of sites allegedly hacked by the group, including Harvard and other universities and Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital in Britain, CNET said.

Mozilla Aims To Warn Users About Dangerous Sites

With the number of malicious Web pages mushrooming over the past several months, the Mozilla Foundation is looking to help users defend themselves. Window Snyder, who is Mozilla's "chief security something-or-other," says the company is taking a two-pronged approach.

First, Mozilla developers are working on giving Firefox 3.0, the next version of the open source browser due later this year, the ability to detect malicious code on Web sites that users are trying to access. "In Firefox 2, there's no mechanism that identifies if malware is present," says Snyder.

Second, developers are working on creating an interface that will warn users that the pages they're trying to call up are dangerous. "We don't want to just pop up an alert that gives them an OK or cancel option," says Snyder. "We want to create a warning that users won't mistake. ... It's going to be a different kind of warning, and it's not going to be a click-through."

Security company Sophos reported last month that the number of malicious Web sites has skyrocketed over the past few months, from 5,000 new ones a day in April to nearly 30,000 a day in early July. One reason, according to Sophos researchers, is that hackers are increasingly turning away from e-mail as their preferred method of spreading malware and putting their focus on malicious sites. In some cases, they're creating their own sites, but in most cases they're hacking into legitimate sites and embedding malware into them.

The mock-up of the alert appears as a red-letter warning that doesn't have a click-through option, and the malicious page wouldn't be able to load. It's still a work in progress, and it could change dramatically before Firefox 3.0 ships, Snyder says. Technicians are debating whether there should be an override mechanism that lets users go to malicious pages regardless of the danger.

One of the most difficult aspects of implementing something like this is making sure the interface communicates clearly to the user, that it's "the sort of thing users won't be able to sail through without a real context change," Snyder says.

Mozilla programmers are rewriting a lot of the Firefox code for the upcoming version release, Snyder says. They're replacing much of the older code to increase performance and make the code base more modular, able to handle new security threats like phishing. In a previous interview, Snyder said some of the browser's components that are written in native code are being rewritten in managed code to reduce memory management flaws, like buffer overflow vulnerabilities. Managed code executes in a virtual machine, so there's less space for memory management problems.

Meanwhile, Mozilla faced another security-related issue recently, one of its own making. An executive appeared to suggest the company could patch any known security vulnerability within 10 days. Snyder, who was quick to try to clear up what Mozilla says was a muddled message, says on her blog that Mozilla doesn't set such parameters: "We do not think security is a game, nor do we issue challenges or ultimatums."

That's not what it sounded like at the Black Hat security conference two weeks ago in Las Vegas. Mike Shaver, director of ecosystem development at Mozilla, passed a business card to security researcher Robert Hansen, known as RSnake, with "ten [expletive] days" written on it. Hansen wrote on his blog that Shaver was claiming that, with responsible disclosure, Mozilla could patch any critical hole in that amount of time. Wrote Hansen, "I told him I would post his card - and he didn't flinch. No, he wasn't drunk. He's serious."

Snyder says Shaver meant that, since Mozilla got a recent security update out in only 10 days, there's no reason security researchers should post details of a vulnerability before a patch is available. But security bloggers pounced on what sure sounded like a challenge. Admits Snyder, "His statement has taken on a life of its own."

Study Finds Internet Rife with Attack Codes

Even seemingly safe web addresses are rife with attack code aiming at vulnerable clients, according to a new study from the Honeynet Project. The study also found that methods such as blacklists can be surprisingly successful in stopping client-side attacks.

Attackers are increasingly turning to end-user systems as a way around the antivirus and firewall systems that are increasingly blocking access to traditional attack routes, according to the researchers, who hail from the US, Germany and New Zealand.

"The ’black hats’ are turning to easier, unprotected attack paths to place their malware onto the end-user’s machine," they said in the study, called "Know Your Enemy: Malicious Web Servers."

The researchers, using a "high-interaction" client honeypot called Capture-HPC developed by the Victoria University of Wellington, analyzed more than 300,000 addresses from around 150,000 hosts.

The study looked at various site categories, including adult, music, news, "warez," defaced, spam and addresses designed to grab traffic from users who mistype common web addresses. While some categories were more likely to contain malicious addresses than others, all contained malicious addresses, the report said.

"As in real life, some ’neighborhoods’ are more risky than others, but even users that stay clear of these areas can be victimized," the report said. "Any user accessing the web is at risk."

Users can be led to malicious sites via links, typing in an address manually, mistyping an address or following search-engine results, the study said.

These results only confirm what security researchers have been saying for some time now. But the study also analyzed the effectiveness of safeguards against such infections in some detail.

The research showed that blacklists, if regularly updated, can be a surprisingly effective way of blocking malicious addresses.

The researchers also recommended regular patching, but this may not always be straightforward, since the study found a prevalence of attacks against plug-ins and non-browser applications. "Attacks also target applications that one might have not think about patching, such as Winzip," the study said.

Another technique that can block attacks would be to use a less popular browser, such as Opera, the study found. "Despite the existence of vulnerabilities, this browser didn’t seem to be a target," the study said.

The data used as the basis for the study has been made available on the Honeynet Project’s website.

Spammers Find New Ways To Slip Through

Just when it appeared tech firms had the upper hand against spam, spammers have unleashed new forms of the meddlesome e-mail to trick filters.

Spam in the form of popular PDF e-mail attachments and electronic greeting cards is confounding e-mail security systems and annoying consumers. The recent Storm e-mail virus and several pump-and-dump stock scams are clogging inboxes and snookering consumers into downloading malicious software. And it could get worse as the holidays approach, anti-spam experts say.

The trend illustrates the shifting nature of spam’s deceptive packaging. As anti-spam vendors come up with solutions, new versions pop up. The most common spam - which uses images to avoid the detection of spam

filters - is quickly fading because of advances in anti-spam technology.

But spam in PDFs, non-existent in May, now accounts for 8% of unsolicited commercial e-mail. Last week, a PDF promoting a pump-and-dump scam contributed to a 30% increase in overall spam. It was sent from compromised PCs turned into spam-spreading bots, security firm Sophos says.

Faux electronic-greeting cards, containing links to viruses, have also picked up. Since mid-July, security firm Postini has blocked about 800 million copies of Storm, an e-mail virus masquerading as a greeting card. "It's a cat-and-mouse game, and PDFs are the latest twist," says Adam Swidler, senior marketing manager at Postini.

Spammers also are beginning to use Excel and Zip files.

As spam evolves, from text in the body of e-mail to images embedded in attachments, it has become more difficult for filters to identify, says Tom Gillis, co-founder of IronPort Systems, a security firm acquired by Cisco Systems. "There is a social engineering element to this. People are more likely to open a PDF file or Excel document, which are more trusted."

Spammers now are also leveraging popular online applications to tout ads for everything from stock scams to Viagra. Subscribers to Google's news alerts are beginning to receive links to such ads among their customary news links.

"Spammers make hay with a technique as long as they can," says Doug Bowers, Symantec's senior director of engineering.

New strains have largely supplanted image spam, which accounted for half of all spam in January. Image spam varies the content of individual messages - through colors, backgrounds, picture sizes or font types - and was harder to detect than text-based spam. Since software makers came up with a solution, image spam has dropped to 8% of all spam, Symantec says.

eBay Says Skype Was Not Attacked

Skype has not been attacked, eBay said Friday, dispelling rumors that Russian hackers took down its popular online telephony service.

For more than a day now, millions of Skype users have been knocked offline by a major service outage that has crippled the service. By Friday morning, things had improved for some users, but many were still unable to connect.

eBay attributes the outage to a problem in a Skype networking algorithm, but code has been posted to a Russian security discussion forum that could supposedly be used to knock the service offline in a DOS (denial of service) attack.

The code, which was published anonymously, appears to be capable of forcing Skype's servers to freeze up, said the discussion forum site's editor, Valery Marchuk, in a posting to the Full Disclosure security discussion list. "Reportedly, it must have caused Skype massive disconnections," he wrote.

Not necessarily so, say researchers who looked at the code Friday.

The code is designed to repeatedly launch Skype and overwhelm the server with information, said Andrew Storms, director of security operations with nCircle Network Security. "But I couldn't say if it would have this kind of potential DOS effect on all of Skype," he said.

The code simply would not work as advertised, said Stefano Zanero, CTO with Secure Network SRL. "The attack code is fake, no doubt on that," he said. "I don't think this is the cause of whatever is happening to Skype."

eBay's Villu Arak addressed the issue directly in a Friday blog post, saying that neither hackers nor a recent technology update were to blame.

"Neither Wednesday's planned maintenance of our Web-based payment services nor any form of attack was related to the current sign-on issues in any way," he wrote.

Half of Web Time Spent Viewing Content

Content online is king. Internet users spend nearly half their time online viewing news or entertainment content, surpassing activities such as sending e-mails, shopping or searching for information, according to a study released by the Online Publishers Association on Monday.

The four-year study, conducted by Nielsen/NetRatings, tracked a 37 percent increase in amount of time spent viewing content such as online videos or news, surpassing a 35 percent rise in using search engines like Google Inc.

The abundance of content and faster online speeds accounted for the spike, the study said. A proliferation of social networks such as News Corps' MySpace and Facebook have helped boost content viewing as well.

Overall, viewing content accounts for 47 percent of time spent online in 2007, up from 34 percent in 2003. Web search accounted for 5 percent of time spent online in 2007 from 3 percent in 2003.

Time spent on commerce sites such as Amazon.com fell 5 percent and accounted for 15 percent of time spent in 2007.

Time spent on communications such as e-mail fell 28 percent to 33 percent of time spent online in 2007, down from 46 percent in 2003.

The popularity of instant messaging such as AOL Instant Messenger, which lets users send quick messages rather than e-mails, accounted for the drop in the amount of time spent corresponding, the study said.

Sony Offers Free Recycling

Consumers in the U.S. will be able to get Sony-brand electronics products recycled for no cost from September under a new recycling program

announced by the consumer electronics company on Friday.

The Sony Take Back Recycling Program will be offered through 75 drop-off locations in the U.S. operated by WM Recycle America LLC and will begin on Sept. 15.

Sony intends to expand it to include about 150 drop-off points - at least one in each state - within the year. Consumers will also have the option to ship their products to a recycling center and Sony will work towards a goal of having centers within 20 miles of 95 percent of the U.S. population.

The issue of electronic waste is growing in importance as the number of gadgets increases and their price comes down. Today, faulty electronics products are more usually junked than repaired and it’s increasingly common for users to replace products not because they are old but because a more attractive product comes along.

In 2005, between 1.9 million and 2.2 million tons of electronics products were discarded in the U.S. of which the vast majority was dumped in landfill sites. As little as 345,000 tons was recycled, according to a study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Disposal by landfill often leads to numerous toxic chemicals leaching into the surrounding ground leaving it poisonous and dangerous to the nearby environment.

The issue is most vividly highlighted in Guiyu, China, where vast amounts of electronics waste are sent for recycling from around the world. There, according to environmental groups, so many toxic substances have escaped into the ground that the area is heavily polluted and dangerous to the health of local citizens.

Greenpeace has been urging electronics companies to cut down the number of toxic substances used in electronics products. It publishes a regular report of how it sees the major consumer electronics companies.

Sony ranked in last place in the most recent report, published in March this year, in part for its take back standards. Greenpeace said the company was part of a coalition that has been opposing producer responsibility in recycling in the U.S. The organization also noted that Sony scores well for have some models that are free of the worst chemicals on the market.

Internet Use Could Kill Off Local Newspapers

News audiences are ditching television and newspapers and using the Internet as their main source of information, in a trend that could eventually see the demise of local papers, according to a new study Wednesday.

"As online use has increased, the audiences of older media have declined," Harvard University professor Thomas Patterson said in a report on the year-long study issued by Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

"In the past year alone... newspaper circulation has fallen by three

percent, broadcast news has lost a million viewers," said the study, entitled "Creative Destruction: An Exploratory Look and News on the Internet."

Meanwhile, the numbers of people using the Internet as a news source have increased - exponentially, in some cases.

Traffic to websites that post news produced by a third source, including search engines and service providers, aggregators, such as topix.net or digg.com, which use software to monitor and post web content; and blogs - increased across the board between April 2006 and the same month in 2007.

Monthly visitors to Digg.com, an aggregator which lets users decide on site content, skyrocketed in the 12 months to April 2007, from two million to more than 15 million.

Other online news sources grew more modestly, with user rates growing by 14 percent for community websites and six percent for blogs.

The Google, Yahoo, AOL and MSN websites between them have about 100 million monthly visitors, far outpacing user numbers on websites of major television networks, which averaged 7.4 million visitors a month.

"Brand name" daily newspapers, such as the New York Times and Washington Post, averaged 8.5 million monthly visitors.

But newspapers in medium-sized to small cities saw either a drop in or no change to the numbers of visitors to their websites, which have already taken readers from hard-copy editions.

The authors of the study predict that many small newspapers could have difficulty holding on to even their web audience, and counsel that they include "national and international news in the mix."

FCC Tested Defective Prototype Device

Microsoft Corp. on Monday gave a simple reason why its prototype for beaming high-speed Internet service over unused television airways failed a government test: the device was broken.

The Federal Communications Commission said on July 31 that the device did not reliably detect unoccupied spectrum and could interfere with other TV programming and wireless microphone signals.

On Monday, Microsoft sent the agency a letter explaining that a subsequent test determined the equipment was defective.

Representatives for Microsoft and other technology companies met with FCC engineers last week and determined the device "was working improperly and an internal component was broken," Microsoft’s managing director for government affairs, Jack Krumholtz, said in a statement on Monday.

"This accounted for the FCC’s aberrant test results," Krumholtz said.

An FCC spokesman declined to comment on the matter.

Microsoft said in an FCC filing that it sent a duplicate device that was functioning properly, but that the agency never tested it.

Microsoft is part of a coalition of companies that wants to beam high-speed Internet service through unoccupied TV channels, also known as "white spaces."

The coalition submitted two prototype devices, one developed by Microsoft and another developed by Phillips Electronics North America Corp., a division of Netherlands-based Royal Philips Electronics NV.

The coalition said the Philips device was able to detect both TV and wireless microphone signals in a laboratory setting.

The FCC's engineering office plans to hold a hearing Thursday to provide an overview of the tests and consider suggestions for further evaluation of the devices.

While FCC Chairman Kevin Martin said he wants the white spaces to be utilized, he's facing resistance from TV broadcasters, who fear that it won't work and would cause problems with TV programming and with a federally mandated transition from analog to digital signals in early 2009.

The coalition said it's confident the FCC will be able to designate the white spaces for high-speed Internet service, which would be accessible and affordable especially in rural areas.

According to its timetable, the FCC could adopt rules for operating unlicensed devices in the white-space spectrum by October and start certifying similar devices that meets its technical requirement. In any case, no devices would go on sale before the digital TV transition in February 2009.

In addition to Microsoft and Philips, the technology coalition includes Google Inc., Dell Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co., Intel Corp. and EarthLink Inc.

Couple Tries To Name Baby 'at' Symbol

A Chinese couple seeking a distinctive and modern name for their child chose the commonly used Internet 'at' symbol, much to the consternation of Chinese officials.

The unidentified couple and the attempted naming were cited Thursday by a Chinese government official as an example of bizarre names creeping into the Chinese language.

The father "said 'the whole world uses it to write e-mails and translated into Chinese it means 'love him,'"' Li Yuming, the vice director of the State Language Commission, said at a news conference.

The symbol pronounced in English as 'at' sounds like the Chinese phrase "love him."

Written Chinese does not use an alphabet but is comprised of characters, sometimes making it difficult to develop new words for new or foreign

things and ideas.

In their quest for a different name, Li said that the parents of baby ’@’ were not alone. As of last year, only 129 surnames accounted for 87 percent of all surnames in China, Li said, suggesting that the uniformity drove people to find more individual given names.

"There was even a ’Zhao-A,’ a ’King Osrina’ and other extremely individualistic names," Li said, according to a transcript of the news conference posted on the government’s main web site, http://www.gov.cn.

Li did not say whether police, who are the arbiters of names because they issue identity cards, rejected baby ’@’ and the others. But nationwide last year there were 60 million people’s names that used "unfamiliar characters," Li said.

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.